



THE REVELATION OF THE PAST IN THE PLAYS OF MAHESH DATTANI

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ABSTRACT

Indian drama has emerged predominantly with Sanskrit drama and its tradition of folk performance. Indian drama is the mirror of society. People can easily connect themselves with this amazing feeling. The playwrights like Badal Sarkar, Girish Karnad, Vijay Tendulkar, Mahesh Dattani and Mahesh Elkunchwar etc have won the heart of the audience. Mahesh Dattani is a Bangalore-based Indian English playwright. He is a versatile genius. He is continuously experimenting with new forms and manners of expression. His plays usually deal with middle-class life in urban India. The major issues Mahesh Dattani deals with are homosexuality, gender identity, communalism, the revelation of the past, the hollowness of middle-class life and the family as a battlefield. The present paper humbly attempts to describe the theme of the revelation of the past as a major theme in the selected plays of Mahesh Dattani. The real motive comes before the audience and the complex web of relationships is visible to the audience.

KEYWORDS: Homosexuality, communalism, revelation, gender identity, middle-class

INTRODUCTION

A Play is meant to be performed. Indian drama has a rich and ancient tradition. Natyashastra is the oldest of the texts on the theory of drama. The dramatic form in India has worked through different traditions- the epic, the folk, the mythical, the realistic etc. The history of Indian English drama demonstrates the presence of great individual talents.

Mahesh Dattani is the first Indian English Dramatist to be awarded the Sahitya Academy Award. He is a Bangalore-based playwright and director. The plays of Mahesh Dattani gained national and international cultural attention. His plays have become part of India's Postcolonial concern. His plays reflect major social issues of contemporary Indian society.

Mahesh Dattani's plays focus on human relationships and personal and moral choices which are the classic concerns of all great works of literature. He is a socially committed artist. He writes about the real-life situation of Indian society. All his plays are about different social concerns. His plays exemplify the artistic blend of Indian and Western cultures and concerns.

The dramatic works of Mahesh Dattani depict different mental statuses, emotions and ideas, desires and aspirations, strengths and weaknesses, basic moral and social questions as well as individual predicaments. They also present a many-layered fascinating picture of the social, political, economic and cultural life of contemporary times. His plays like *There's a will* (1988), *Dance like a man* (1989), *Tara* (1990), *Bravely Fought The Queen* (1991), *Final Solutions* (1993), *Do the Needful* (1997), *On A Muggy Night in Mumbai* (1998), *Seven steps around the fire* (1999), and *thirty days in September* (2001), are glorious works that would bring credit to any literature.

In the true sense, Mahesh Dattani is the most unorthodox and contemporary playwright of Indian English drama. He has used the medium of the stage to present the invisible issues to the audience. His plays are the mirror of society. Alyque Padamshee says that Mahesh Dattani is one of the most serious contemporary playwrights.

The plays of Mahesh Dattani invariably question a few of the norms and conventions prevailing in contemporary Indian society regarding gender bias and other social relationships like homosexuality, lesbianism, prejudiced gender identity etc. Mahesh Dattani deals with issues like the male-female ascendance divide, patriarchal tradition, unusual sexual orientation, Communalism, and marginalization. Mahesh Dattani virtually holds back nothing. As a powerful playwright, Mahesh Dattani employed his literary potential to generate mass consciousness towards these issues and social upliftment of the marginalized section of our society.

His plays bring Indian drama into the present day in their themes –sexuality, religious tensions and gender issues. Characters in the plays of Mahesh Dattani hide their motivation. They hide their past actions in their relationship with people. 'Tara' is the story of a girl who wants to twinkle and shine. Bharat in the play shows excessive love for Tara. She decides to donate her kidney to Tara when there is already another donor. All these decisions are motivated by the inhuman act of having decided to deprive Tara of one leg. The chances of survival of the

leg were much better with Tara than with Chandan. It is the knowledge of having committed a wrong that leads to her mental breakdown. Her relationship with her husband deteriorates. Bharat brides Roopa to be friendly with Tara. Roopa is offensive and comic. The dramatist deliberately creates an opportunity for the audience to laugh at Roopa. She speaks English which is comical. She is portrayed as a kind who will grow up to constitute the ever-interfering, ever-watching ogling society. The audience comes to understand that Chandan's father was more interested in his career of Chandan than Tara. Gender bias of the character becomes visible when the audience understands that Mr Patel agreed to the decision of his father-in-law because he lacked the courage to oppose him. There is a complex web of relationships in the family. Revelation of the past tells this to the audience. The play is about the complications of family life. It is about the facade of middle-class morality and commitment to family values. Revelation of the past puts a big question mark on the morality that the Patel family practises. If the decision to give the leg to Chandan was taken by Bharti and her father, Patel had kept quiet because of Bharti's father's social status. This is also because he had no clear-cut views to the contrary. His family has cut them off because of their intercaste, inter-regional marriage. They are dependent on Bharti's father for both monetary and moral support. This, in turn, has led to a power structure within the family where Bharti and her father take important decisions. The audience sees the couple bickering after the death of Bharti's father. Bharti feels the full force of her guilt in deciding Tara. Bharti's final act of donating her kidney to Tara is an act of expiration. However, it is futile.

The revelation of the skeleton in the cupboard is the typical action of a play by Mahesh Dattani. Here the skeleton points out the issue of gender. The audience sees characters struggling to meet the imminent moment of crisis. The process of revelation, the unearthing of secrets, and the unmasking of the supportive family are some of the major concerns in the plays of Dattani. Individuals cannot exist in a vacuum. Individuals cannot escape the consequences of societal dictates and familial choices.

'Final Solutions' is the story of a Gujarati family that consists of four people– a grandmother (Daksha /hardika), father (ramnik), mother [aruna] and daughter [smita]. they encounter two Muslim boys – Javed and Bobby. They arrive at the House seeking refuge from a bloodthirsty mob during a Hindu festival in the play. There are various revelations the audience comes to know about the heinous behaviour of Ramnik's father and grandfather. Ramnik says to Javed that he had a saree shop. He had a mill also. He wanted to give Javed a job in the saree shop. When the past is revealed the audience understands the real reason why Ramnik was doing this. The play raises the theme of the revelation of the past in a way never done before in Indian English theatre. The play challenges the stereotypical view of communal persons in society. English-speaking people can also be communal in a dangerous way. There are no good Hindus or bad Hindus. There are no good Muslims or bad Muslims. Characters are caught in the trap of conditioning and past experiences.

Mahesh Dattani's 'On a Muggy Night in Mumbai' is a play about the fears and Insecurity faced by six individuals in Mumbai. They are unable to adjust to the outside world.

However, their world is ripped apart by jealousy, separation and a feeling of lone-

liness. These characters continuously feel the need to always hide their homosexual leanings. However, when the past relationship is revealed the audience sees the characters from a new perspective. In the play, Kamlesh is a homosexual. He is comfortable with his gayness. However, he is in turmoil. His sister is going to marry his former lover who pretends to be straight (heterosexual). Sharad and Deepali are comfortable with their sexuality. They have different ways of being gay. The past relationship between Kamlesh and Peakadh and the romance between Ed and kamlesh's sister, kiran are beautifully presented. The audience then comes to know that Ed and Prakash are the same persons. Sharad speaks about the benefits of trying to pretend as if one is heterosexual. It helps to get accepted. It helps to fit in with the society represented by the Marriage party going downstairs. He says that male power buys respect in society. The characters are struggling with their identity. Bunny says that the man who loves his wife does not exist for him. The only people who know him are the persons in the room where the action is taking place. He says that he has tried to survive in both worlds. Everyone believes that he was a model middle-class Indian man. He was selected for the role because he looked exactly at what the common people's perception was about an ideal male.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, the past plays a very important role in the plays of Mahesh Dattani. He is an experimentative and enterprising dramatist. He takes up radical issues of contemporary society. When the past of some of the characters is revealed in his plays, the audience comes to know many new things in light of this revelation. The past is linked to the present. It shapes the future. Mahesh Dattani presents it in such a way that the audience finds themselves on the stage for the first time in an Indian English drama. The revelation of the past helps Mahesh Dattani to depict realistically the life of an urban middle class in India.

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